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EASLEY STATION

577 Butts, A. P.  
C16.5 Easley station, by A. P. Butts. Privately  
85 printed by the author, Nov. 12, 1957.  
120296 102. Zytches. 26cm.  
History of the Easley Depot in Calhoun  
County, Ga., from the perspective of the  
neighboring Kropf family.

A. P. BUTTS

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Regarding the station of Easley.

I am sure that you, as a student of railroad history, and the Fort Dodge Des Moines & Southern in particular, will be interested in some of the "history"

facts regarding its construction, in relation to my wife's  
 627 Butts, A P  
 .C16.6 Easley station, by A.P. Butts. Privately  
 B8 printed by the author, Nov.12, 1962.

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 History of the Easley depot in Calhoun County, Ia., from the perspective of the neighboring Kropf family.

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the heavy profile sod with a few trees, covered the farm and continued to live there until he retired from farming. His widow, (my wife's mother) aged 90 and presently living with us still owns the farm. The farm lies along the Calhoun/Wabster County line two miles north of Farmington and when the Newton & Northwestern was built in 1902, they took a little over two acres from the north-east corner of the farm, the station of Easley, being 300 yards over into Calhoun County.



Regarding the station of Easley.

I am sure that you, as a student of railroad history, and the Fort Dodge Des Moines & Southern in particular, will be interested in some of the "homey" facts regarding its construction, in relation to my wife's family and even herself.

My wife's girlhood home was only about 100 yards from the Easley depot. Her father, J. R. Kropf, as a boy of 16 moved with his parents on that farm in 1883, having purchased it the year before when the Toledo & Northwestern was built through Farnhamville. Broke the heavy prairie sod with a four horse team, improved the farm and continued to live there untill he retired from farming. His widow, (my wife's mother) aged 90 and presently living with us still owns the farm. The farm lies along the Calhoun/Webster County line two miles north of Farnhamville and when the Newton & Northwestern was built in 1903, they took a little over two acres from the north-east corner of the farm, the station of Easley, being 200 yards over into Calhoun County.





When the H. W. Poor Construction Company of Boston, Mass. took the contract to build the road northwest from Gowrie to Rockwell City they must have had their first grading camp at Gowrie, because when they got three miles west of Gowrie, which would be half way to Easley, they contacted Mr. Kropf and made arrangements to set up camp in his grove, which was only a few hundred feet from the Easley station, where it continued to remain untill they were about half way to Rinard, at which time the camp was moved to that place.

The contractor hired what few teams and men he could from the farmers along the right-of-way, but he had a large gang of men of his own, for which he had to find board and lodging. The teams of which there were about twenty, were fed out of temporary mangers, similiar to cattle feeding bunks, that we see today, the teams were unhoused, having to stand out in all kinds of weather. Their feed being purchased from the various farmers. Mr. Kropf selling them all the corn and oats and hay he could afford to spare, without danger of running short for his own horses and cattle.

The camp consisted of several small tents, with cots, that were used for sleeping the men, a black smiths forge and anvil for shoeing horses and re-





pairing equipment, but the main center of attraction was the cooking and mess tent, which was a long tent with cook stove and kitchen work tables in one end and a long dining table seating about 20 men in the other end. This tent was presided over by Charley the cook who was a large jolly tobacco chewing man with a long heavy mustache, often dripping with tobacco juice. His staples of groceries, included flour, beef, pork, bacon, potatoes, ect.

These were hauled by team and wagon from Farnhamville, the nearest railroad town two and a half miles away. Some eggs, milk butter and garden produce was purchased from the Kropf's farm, water was also obtained from the farm, for all cooking and dishwashing. Charley's cook tent was like a magnet for all the children, perhaps because Charley always treated them to a cookie or doughnut, often sending them home with a treat for other members of the family. All agreed that Charlie was indeed a very fine pastry cook, and it delighted him, no end when the children bragged about his culinary skill.

My brother in law, then a little fellow of four, spent much of his time with Charlie, listening to his tall stories of the time he cooked for a logging



camp in northern Minnesota, probably Paul Bunyon yarns, which he half believed himself, then he would go home and tell his folks what a wonderful man Charlie was. Any way he was delighted to have children around him, if for no other reason than to have some one to talk to, and he was their hero. My wife, then seven, and rather shy, often carried milk and eggs to him and always stayed to visit awhile, leaving with the usual cookies and doughnuts, but says she would have liked him better without his huge tobacco stained mustache. He baked his own bread, pies as well as great platters of cookies and doughnuts, feeding the gang liberally with huge portions of meat, potatoes, gravy and vegetables. There was never any complaint about his food or the way it was prepared, and the brass hats, when out looking over the grading work, never missed an opportunity to partake of one of his fine meals.

There was some very heavy grading, a mile and a half west of Easley, a deep cut half a mile long and two high fills, one on each side of Hardin Creek, where later, a trestle was built. When the gang broke camp at the Kropf grove, to move five miles west, they had become so well acquainted that





they seemed more like neighbors leaving, than a bunch of strangers, whom they would probably never see again. At their final leaving, there were many fervent farewells, and many promises to visit them at their forward camp.

That fall, the carpenter gang of six men came and boarded with the Kropf family, while they built the Easley depot and stockyards. The stock yards were elaborate for such a small station, consisting of four pens, two of which were roofed, and a large high sided chute leading up to the platform that led into the stock cars. The depot was one of the finest carpenter jobs, I have ever seen, very substantially built, with the best of lumber, used in its construction. After the passenger cars quite running in the latter 20's it was sold to my brother in law for \$50.00, and although the lumber was cheap in 1903, it probably cost ten times that amount to build. I started to help my brother in law dismantle it, but it proved so substantially built that I tired of the slowness of the job and left him to finish the job on his own.

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The Easley depot was the conventional size and shape, like all the others built at that time, with a waiting room at one end and the freight room at





the other end which had large sliding doors so baggage trucks could be pulled inside from the station platform. In between was the agents office with large bay window in front and doors leading to both the waiting room. There are at this time, only three, viz; Boxholm, Gowrie and Rockwell City. I think you have pictures of all that I took on the Rockwell City Line, in 1911 with my little Brownie camera. They have become quite historical now. When I came here in 1909, all of these depots were practically brand new, being only six years old at the time. They each had a long wooden platform at which we could spot half a dozen merchandise cars, going from one to the other, unloading binders, wagons, buggies, huge wooden boxes of dry goods, shoes, clothing and groceries of all kinds and loading cream cans, crates of chickens, ducks and turkeys, crated veal calves going to some local butcher, pure bred hogs and sheep for breeding purposes and all manner of things, as the way freight was the only way of moving any and all merchandise, in those days. What wonderful dreams those builders of our road had in those bygone days, visions of a rapidly growing community, ever expanding, calling for more and more service. They risked their own time and money as well as all they could borrow, and builded better than they knew.



Now for my wife's part of the story. The summer of 1904, was in the horse and buggy days and travel was slow. Where today, we travel five miles in that many minutes, then it would take an hour to go the same distance. But with all the slowness, those were the happy days. Relative visited with relative, practically every Sunday, after church, gathering first at one home, one Sunday, then another the next, always a large group of happy men and women, and vivacious hungry children, impatient for the delectable dinner that they knew would be served at noon time. After dinner, while the women were clearing the table, and doing the dishes, and of course talking all the time, the men stroll about looking at the various crops, and discussing them, and the children overflowing with energy, start playing ball or some such other game, such as "Hide and Seek". Such was the case, that bright sunny June, Sunday of 1904.

The depot at Easley was new, having been completed only the preceeding winter of 1903 & 04, and was still the center of attraction, for the men and children, as it was unoccupied, and the doors were never locked. After going through it and inspecting the building, the men drifted back toward the house





and the children decided to have a game of "Hide and Seek", Those familiar with the construction of the standard small town depot, know how the Bay Window extends outward, so as to give the agent a view up and down the track, each way as he sits at his built in desk. Under the desk, at the right side are several drawers for stationery and records of various kinds. Under the left side of this desk top is a large space with only a single shelf about half way between the floor and desk top and extending several feet inward, to the outer or front of the Bay Window, and is used for storing the large station record books. The door to this compartment is about 18 by 24 inches and is held shut by an ordinary cupboard latch. Sometime during the "Hide and Seek" game, my wife not yet eight years old and her cousin Margaret, the same age, decided this left hand cupboard would be the ideal place to hide, so crawled in feet first, one on the shelf and the other on the floor, pulling the door shut untill the latched locked. They were securely hid all right but never realised at the time that they were locked in. The other children came and looked all over but could not find them, as they lay there, as quite as a mouse, as the saying goes. Finally they gave up and left, after which the girls tried to open



the door only to find that they were securely locked in. It was hot inside and the air was stuffy, they screamed for help, but there was no one near to hear their cries for help, and they were unheard. Panic seized them, they cried, they screamed and prayed, but to no avail.

The other children reported to the men, that the two girls could not be found, and all became excited and alarmed, and began an immediate search. The barns and outbuildings were searched thoroughly, but no girls could be found. The mothers became frantic, then some one remembered that they were last seen near the new depot, so the search shifted there. As the searchers approached the depot faint muffled cries could be heard, but they were so faint that it was impossible to locate the source. Some searched beneath the building while others carried the search inside. First they sounded as if the cries came from under the floor, but those outside reported there was no one under the building, then the search came to the office room, where it was determined that the moans were coming from under the desk, and behind the little door. It was jerked open, and two hysterical girls, half dead from heat and suffocation were helped out.





Margaret died the following August, from other causes, but the terrible shock on that beautiful June day, two months previously may have been a contributing factor, my wife has also suffered from claustrophobia ever since

Such is the story of the Easley depot, in relation to my wife's family. They saw its beginning, and the end and Mrs Kropf may live to see the beginning and end of the entire line. There was never an agent at Easley, the station accounts from the beginning were handled by the agent at Gowrie, and the depot was used only for freight storage and passenger use, during the few years the steam train ran from Newton to Rockwell City and the less than twenty years of electric trolley car service.

The station could contribute much to history, if it could have talked. The happy ambitious school children who rode the electric cars to High School, before the days of the school bus. The many boys going to and returning from war, some returning in caskets, not alone but accompanied by one of equal rank. Happy rice showered brides and grooms starting out on lifes long journey. Captured bank robbers, in irons headed for Fort Madison, and my daughter, most of all waiting in the empty build-



ing, for the car, after a visit to her grand-  
parents, the Kropf's. - "Yes, its life history,  
though short could fill volumes".

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A. P. Butts

Nov. 12, 1962

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